

What to Present in the Gospel, Acts 17:24-27 – October 26th, 2008

- Paul is on his second missionary journey, and has been teaching us a number of valuable ways to present the Gospel to non-believers.
- It's been interesting to see how he has sort of taken this novel approach with this philosophically curious crowd here on Mars Hill.
- It's worth noting that it was the Apostle's very unique approach that actually presented this opportunity at this meeting of the Aeropagus.

- Last week, Paul showed us "How to Present the Gospel," and today he's going to show us "What to Present in the Gospel."

- Verses 22-23 are a teaching on "How to Present the Gospel."
- Verses 24-31 are a teaching on "What to Present in the Gospel."
- Verses 32-34 are a teaching on "What to expect from the Gospel."

1. Be tactful (Verse 22)

- Paul tactfully establishes a common ground from which to agree by telling them that he noticed in every way that they are very religious.

2. Be observant (Verse 23a)

- Paul then tells them that as he was walking around in Athens, he observed that, and looked carefully at, their objects of worship.

3. Be Bold (Verse 23b)

- Paul goes onto say that he found an altar with the inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Then he makes a rather bold declaration.

1. Man falls short of the glory of God (Verses 24-25a)

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, ...

v24 Paul starts at the beginning by telling them that this God created the heavens and the earth, but doesn't dwell in manmade places.

v25a He takes it a further by saying that not only doesn't He dwell in manmade places, but he can't be represented by manmade idols.

- Paul is telling them that man falls short of the glory of God and can't do anything to obtain, or contain God, as they have with their gods.

"Paul banished all the gods of Greece to oblivion and all their idols and images to the rubbish heap. And he did so without saying so. ..."It is impossible either to corner God in a temple or to conceptualize Him with an idol."

John Phillips, "Exploring Acts," v2 pp 350, 351

- Paul brilliantly realizes that they have to change their ideas about God because they had a very different world view related to God.

"This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics."

John Stott

- So why does the Apostle Paul begin presenting the Gospel at the beginning? Because he has to wisely expose their many false gods.
- It's so important to know that in the beginning God created. If one doesn't, then everything else is up for one's own interpretation.
- It's been said that if one doesn't believe that in the beginning God created in Genesis 1:1, then the rest of the Bible will be unbelievable.

- The bottom line is that, as Paul had previously stated, "they were very religious," and religion is all about what man does for God.
- Paul realizes that he will have to present the opposite view; "it's not what man does for God, it's what God has already done for man."
- As we'll see in a moment, the Greeks believed that man can become a god. Paul knows he needs to tell them that God became a man.

2. Man is not superior or righteous (Verses 25b-26)

25b ...because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

v25b Paul then goes on to tell them that it is God Himself Who gives all men life and breath. He's the giver of life because He is life.

v26 Paul is referring to how all men descended from Adam to Noah and all the nations have inhabited the earth according to God's plan.

- Paul is going somewhere with this. He's ever so carefully showing them how all men are the same, and no man can become a god.

- Paul was keenly aware that Greeks believed themselves to be the superior race, which is why the Olympic Games came from Greece.
- This is wisdom from above given to Paul to communicate to them that all the different races can be genetically traced back to Adam.
- He knows that if he's to make this unknown God known to them, he has to demolish their "man-god's" so they'll accept the "God-man."

3. Man needs to seek God to be saved (Verse 27)

27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

v27 Paul now tells them the "why" behind the "what." In other words, the reason "why" God did "what" He did is so man will seek Him.

- He goes on to say that God sort of wired us this way so we will reach out for Him and find Him because He's not far from each of us.
- After Paul shows them that they're not superior, but sinners, he then tells them that this is why they need to seek God for salvation.